

VZCZCXRO7297
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHBP #0521/01 1281616
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 081616Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5364
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0248
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0022
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0013
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0243
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 0189
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 0084
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000521

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/27/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [EINV](#) [ASEC](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: FALLOUT FROM QADHAFI'S VISIT CONTINUES AS TUAREGS
DEBATE AUTONOMY FOR KIDAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 00443
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00208

BAMAKO 00000521 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, U.S. Embassy
Bamako, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The fallout from Qadhafi's tumultuous mid-April visit to Timbuktu (ref A) continued to spread as members of the National Assembly expressed concern over Libya's intentions and some Tuareg leaders requested autonomy for Kidal. On April 19 a group of National Assembly Deputies suggested calling Prime Minister Issoufi Maiga before the Assembly to answer questions regarding Libya's role in northern Mali. Meanwhile, Qadhafi's Cabinet Director, Becher Salah, arrived in Kidal to meet with former National Guard deserter Hassan Fagaga. During the meeting, Fagaga and a handful of northern leaders demanded autonomy for the Kidal region - an old idea that seems to have resurfaced concurrent with Qadhafi's sometimes bizarre interventions in the north. End Summary.

Deputies Question Qadhafi's Motives

[1](#)2. (C) On April 19 a group of National Assembly Deputies from the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) suggested calling Prime Minister Issoufi Maiga before the Assembly to respond to questions regarding Mali's relationship with Libya. This coincided with an official request by the Assembly for testimony from the Ministers of Justice and Investment on matters unrelated to the north. According to reports, the Deputies hoped to ask the Prime Minister to explain the reasoning behind Libya's newly opened consulate in Kidal given the absence of any Libyan citizens in the region. Reports indicated the Deputies were also eager for details of Qadhafi's secretive meeting in Timbuktu with former National Guard deserter Hassan Fagaga.

[1](#)3. (C) An Embassy contact within the National Assembly subsequently stated that the Assembly had no intentions of formally calling the Prime Minister to testify. After what appears to have been a quick intervention by the Presidency,

the Assembly's requests for testimony from the Justice and Investment Ministers were also tabled.

No Hidden Agenda

¶4. (C) During an unusually candid press conference on April 30, however, Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane responded to questions regarding Libya's role in the north. The responsibilities of a consulate, Ouane told the national press, go beyond serving the needs of citizen nationals. According to Ouane, the Libyan consulate in Kidal serves as an extension of the Libyan Embassy in Bamako by increasing the reach of Libyan diplomacy and strengthening bilateral cooperation. Ouane noted that during the consulate's opening ceremony he met with his Libyan counterpart, the Libyan Consul and the Governor of Kidal to ensure that the consulate played by the "rules". Ouane did not specify what the "rules" entailed. Ouane concluded by saying that there was "no hidden agenda" behind the opening of the consulate in Kidal.

¶5. (C) Comment. Ouane's remarks are interesting given his initial opposition to Libya's request to open a consulate in Kidal (see ref B). During his brief exchange with the press, Ouane compared the Libyan consulate in Kidal to the Algerian consulate in Gao and observed that while it was true no Libyan citizens lived in Kidal, no Algerians lived in Gao either. This is not altogether correct, however, since there are a number of Algerian citizens in northern Mali and the largely nomadic populations of northern Mali and southern Algeria are closely linked. Unlike the Libyan Consul in Kidal, moreover, the Algerian Consul in Gao administers no development programs. End comment.

BAMAKO 00000521 002.2 OF 003

A Second Libyan Visit and Demands for Autonomy in Kidal

¶6. (C) Qadhafi's Cabinet Director, Bechir Salah, arrived in Kidal on April 21 to celebrate the end of Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Fagaga's "rebellion" and pursue "peace talks" initiated during the private meeting between Fagaga and Qadhafi held in Timbuktu one week earlier. Assuming the role of facilitator, Salah presided over a meeting between Fagaga and Kidal representatives, the Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone, the Governor of Gao, and the Director of the Malian Office for Northern Development.

¶7. (C) Minister Kone - a former Minister of Defense and active military General - was President Amadou Toumani Toure's (ATT) commanding officer in 1991 when ATT led the uprising that unseated former dictator Moussa Traore. Kone is regarded as a close ATT confident and military advisor. Dispatched from Bamako, Kone apparently intended to meet Salah's plane in Gao but the Libyan delegation decided at the last moment to fly directly to Kidal instead, enabling Salah to precede the arrival of his Malian host just as Qadhafi preceded the arrival of ATT in Timbuktu.

¶8. (C) During the meeting Fagaga and his followers articulated a demand for greater autonomy for the Kidal region. Kone rejected this idea, stating that such a move would signal a step toward succession and the partition of Mali. The Minister also rejected a request for financial compensation for former rebels to ease their reintegration into the Malian armed forces. In response, Salah offered Libyan funding for rebel reintegration. Kone opposed this as well and noted that, even if Libya were to provide reintegration support, the funds would be given to the Malian Office of Northern Development for distribution throughout the northern regions.

Northerners Divided on Question of Autonomy

¶9. (C) Following the call for northern autonomy, a National Assembly Deputy from the region of Menaka, Bajan Ag Hamatou, stated publicly that he was "not in agreement with the people of Kidal" regarding the question of autonomy and would "never be associated with any project geared toward the partition of Malian territory." Three days later, on April 28, Hamatou retracted this statement and affirmed that he was, in fact, in favor of autonomy if it would lead to improved development for the north. On May 2 an influential former rebel leader, Ilias Ag Ayouba of the Idaksahak group from the region of Gao, issued a statement opposing greater autonomy for the north. Ayouba then asked the Libyan Consul to intervene to unite Tuareg communities behind the Malian republic and ATT. On May 3 several former rebel leaders and northern representatives met with northern National Assembly Deputies in the office of the Assembly's 2nd vice-president, Assarid Ag Imbarcawane. The northerners warned that the up to now silent GOM needed to make an official statement vis-a-vis Kidal autonomy or risk being overtaken by events.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Malian press initially reported that Bechir Salah would arrive in Kidal with a shipment of weapons to be incinerated in a symbolic bonfire akin to the 1996 "Flame of Peace" in Timbuktu that marked the end of the last Tuareg rebellion. Although the arms and bonfire never materialized, Qadhafi's foray into the politics of northern Mali has re-ignited a somewhat familiar national debate. Periodic demands for northern autonomy are not new. The concept's sudden re-emergence, however, in conjunction with intensified Libyan interest and increased oil speculation in the north, provides a new and rather uncertain dynamic. Indeed, some national commentators have suggested that current rumblings over northern autonomy "smell of oil". Whether this is

BAMAKO 00000521 003.2 OF 003

actually the case, the renewed calls for autonomy, Libya's role as a suspected supporter of past Tuareg revolts, Qadhafi's recent references to a "Greater Sahara", and promises of large-scale Libyan funded development projects have sparked a genuine sense of concern within the GOM.
McCulley